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## The Phillips Memorial Art Gallery

By DUNCAN PHILLIPS

THE Phillips Memorial Art Gallery is now open to the public at 1600 Twenty-first Street N. W., Washington, D. C. This is to be the home of the collection for several years while plans for the permanent building are in a formative and plastic state. Although it is too soon to make definite announcements of all that we intend to do, since force of circumstances or changed conditions may cause our best laid plans to be altered or amended, nevertheless the time is ripe for telling about the treasures and for creating an interest in the special and novel character of the Phillips Memorial.

It is to be a home for the fine arts and a home for all those who love art and go to it for solace and spiritual refreshment. We wish, therefore, to create an atmosphere which is attractive and intimate rather than grandiose and institutional, in which visitors will feel inclined to linger, and to which they will wish to return again and again for a special sort of pleasure or for study. The ultimate building must not be large, no matter to what size the collection may grow. Our idea is not to show all of our treasures at once but to have ever varied and purposeful exhibitions, arranging the collection in units which would be frequently changed so that the walls of the various rooms would undergo interesting transformations.<sup>1</sup> No crowding of the walls nor disfiguring additions to the building as the collections grow can ever be permitted to destroy the harmony of our rooms and the essential domestic character of the architecture as a whole. In the fireproof storage vaults light and air will be supplied and the paintings hung on sliding screens, so that they can be at all times available

<sup>1</sup>Frank Jewett Mather has written, "A season at the Phillips Memorial may be as exciting as a season of opera."

to the visitors. These storage vaults should be made to communicate with the auditorium, which we propose to have for plays, concerts, and lectures, and also with the rooms for special study, so that the lecturers and the students may avail themselves of the actual works of art and not have to resort to lantern slides and photographs. We intend to have a comprehensive art library and portfolios of prints. It is not our present intention to conduct an art school, in the commonly accepted sense of the word, though there may be studios in the building. We propose that the architecture shall be of some domestic type combining sensuous and subtle beauty with simplicity and quiet charm, some such low and rambling type, adaptable to sky-lit galleries, as the Italian villa or our own southern Colonial manor house. We hope for a site commanding a view of the beautiful city of Washington, for wooded grounds laid out with terraces and gardens modified, like the building itself, if Italian, to conform with our national character and appropriate not only to the architecture but to the local conditions of topography and climate.

It is proposed that each room in the building shall be regarded as an aesthetic unit, the decorative accessories changed with the changes in the exhibitions. Occasionally rooms will be devoted to the display of the best works by selected artists, rooms which will represent them from every aspect of their character and genius, and to which their admirers will wish to make pilgrimages to renew their interest and to refresh their faith. Occasionally rooms will be given educational intention. The origin and growth of certain aesthetic tendencies will be traced back to the early periods of art's history. The collection is to be devoted essentially to the art of our own time, but works of any period, no matter how remote, may be purchased or borrowed for educational purposes. In this way we can show the artist's evolving and revolving interests and aptitudes. Groups of works by artists of similar temperaments and of related aims would have special appeal for kindred spirits and would help to clarify for students certain significant aspects of the creative impulse through the

ages. The exhibition units will be composed not only of groups of related artists, showing similar training and intentions, but also of other groups, teaching, by means of contrasted merits, that in the house of art there are many mansions. It will be interesting to present contrasts of similar subjects treated at different times in different manners, thus teaching history and art simultaneously and to their mutual advantage.

Besides the rearrangement and alternating reviews of the permanent collections in the various rooms there will be a long gallery devoted to all kinds of exhibitions of contemporary art. Our most enthusiastic purpose will be to reveal the richness of the art created in our United States, to stimulate our native artists and afford them inspiration. In all the rooms the setting will be carefully planned, and executed with the object of enhancing the effect of the paintings, of emphasizing their essential character, and of producing a sympathetic background and a perfect *ensemble*. For instance, in the Twachtman room, those who know the marvelous nuances of color, opalescent and phosphorescent, in the works by this great master will be delighted to find these subtle felicities echoed in the background in choice bits of Chinese pottery, Persian lustre ware, or Greek glass. To complete the room imagine a black carpet and a wall like that in our present gallery, where a gray, transparent mesh hangs over the plaster, which is toned a delicate apricot.

Only time can tell whether our funds will be sufficient to purchase antique potteries and porcelain, bronzes and ivories, carved furniture, tapestry, and stained glass. Our modern sculptors, however, are quite as distinguished as our painters and worthy of the same support and faith, and as for our potters and goldsmiths, our craftsmen of all kinds, if they are yet inferior to the men of the earlier dynasties of the Orient and of the Middle Ages of Europe, it is only a question of relative quality. By our encouragement of native and contemporary work we can bring about another era of loving and inspired handicraft which will further glorify the meaning of common things. It will not be

our intention to compete with the great museums in assembling objects of historic interest or in having every phase and period in the history of fine and applied art represented with examples. We must specialize in painting, more particularly in modern painting, and it will be our pleasure to show how our American artists maintain their equality with, if not indeed their superiority to, their better known foreign contemporaries.

We are making no effort as yet to raise sums of money through benefactions from wealthy patrons, to which course we would turn only in case we later decided to enlarge the educational scope of the gallery and employ a staff of resident workers and specialists. Such a change of policy would bring us into competition with the museums of the country, which at present we regard with respect from the distance that separates the private dwelling house from the institution of learning. Of course, we mean to afford ample opportunities for study. Our lectures will not be comic monologues, nor our concerts jazz, nor our library shelves devoted to magazines on the movies.

Nevertheless, while we wish to create an atmosphere of culture in which people will feel mentally stimulated with a desire for knowledge, we wish it to be one in which there is no air of academic wisdom and formality. In other words, we wish to popularize what is best in art by the attractiveness of our methods of presentation without making concessions to the public in matters of taste or in the standards set for the works of art endorsed by the gallery. If we can make our visitors feel at home in the midst of beautiful things and subconsciously stimulated while consciously rested and refreshed, we believe that they will eventually absorb the point of view of our artists and remain thereafter on the same aesthetic level. We believe that it is never right to make art easy and popular at the risk of making it commercial and indolently conventional. If a renaissance of art is to come in our time, it must come not from the ever devoted few but from the awakened interest and enlightened patronage of the many. Our hope, therefore, is that by bringing art to the people in the most attractive way

without lowering our standards, we may relate beauty to their lives for their inspiration and solace without relinquishing our duty of guiding them to the heights of art and of keeping the fires burning on our own altars.

We are conscious of a desire to demonstrate that what we are doing, others can do, and that similar memorial galleries can be launched wherever there is a wish and a need for them. We would be glad if our building could be ultimately made a memorial composed of memorials, in other words, of rooms or exhibition units dedicated to the memory of the beloved dead. Whereas we shall specialize in modern painting, and whereas our inspired predecessor, Mr. Freer, specialized in Far Eastern art, the next memorial gallery might specialize in Italian Primitives, or in Colonial furniture, or in Flemish tapestries, or in Gothic glass. If our plan is worthy of our effort, it will be as a beacon light for others.

To accomplish our purpose, we plan to take the public into our confidence at the very outset of our enterprise. We wish to stimulate a demand for what we can supply and to counsel with men and women of many minds whose thoughts we need. There is but one way to bring scattered communities together, to consolidate their most inspired ideas, and to unite their most generous impulses, and that way is the way of the printed word, that ancient medium of exchange—the book. Therefore we propose to publish under the auspices of, and to prepare the way for, the Phillips Memorial Art Gallery, an annual volume for all the arts, even as the gallery is to be a home for all the arts. The first volume is now in preparation and is to contain not only the bare outline of our plans for the gallery and a catalogue of the collection, but essays on French and American painters represented in the collection, and critical notes on all the other artists preceding the list of works by which they are represented. The book will be profusely illustrated. A popular edition without the expensive features will also be published. In subsequent years we shall broaden the scope of our book,

which will include articles on all the arts, and reviews of the preceding season's best concerts, plays, operas, books, and exhibitions. There will be letters from London and Paris. Needless to say, our contributors will be the best authorities available. Contributions of original drawings will supplement the photographs, and we shall obtain permission to reprint short stories, one act plays, lyrics, essays, and musical compositions—offering work especially made for us when of sufficient merit. There will be a forum for the exchange of ideas and suggestions for the future development of the Memorial Gallery and its activities. The first of a series of inexpensive monographs is the present volume on Daumier.

Although we are dreaming already of the remote future and planning for posterity, yet we welcome interest in our modest beginnings and we welcome all who care to come to the two small rooms which must constitute for the present the home of the Phillips Memorial Art Gallery.